

# METRO

## Family Finds Their Fortune in Cookies

By JOSEPH GEHA  
Metro Editor

“Sugar, flour, oil and egg.” These four elementary ingredients are the foundation of a decades-long tradition of fortune cookie baking in the heart of Oakland’s Chinatown District.

Tom’s Bakery on Ninth Street in Oakland, started by Wai King Lim and her husband Thomas Lim, has been producing thousands of fresh fortune cookies every day in the same location for over 40 years. Wai King, originally from the Guangdong province, historically known as Canton Province, in China, came to America in 1963.

Assisted by her son Adam Lim, sister Helen Lim and several other dedicated employees, Wai King wears a modest flowered apron to work as she supervises the production lines.

The relentless screeches and clanks of mechanized bakery equipment sound throughout the small facility as it continually spits out a portion of batter onto a hot metal plate, and quickly sends it through a covered pit where it is fired into a fully cooked mini pancake of sorts.

While still hot and malleable, it is gently scraped off the plate and sent into an automated set of finger-like steel prongs that insert the paper fortune slip and bend the cookie into its signature shape, then dumping the warm treat and its friendly message into a tin bucket waiting below.

For the first 15 years of their operation, the cookie flats were all folded by hand, a fluid motion that requires a delicate dexterity.

Those same cookies are bagged, boxed and then stacked in the main entryway where they are quickly bought up by customers, generally within a day or two, as it has been for years. Even the cash register, an old McCaskey filled with modern bills, emanates of tradition and timelessness.

Being in the same place for so long has garnered Tom’s Bakery a loyal customer base of individuals and restaurateurs from the local area, and they also ship all over the country to out of state clients.

Adam attributes their longevity and success to a quality product made with care, and an open, honest business approach.

“Word of mouth. Customers are satisfied with the product, and it just spreads from there,” he said as he explained they do zero advertising. He believes if you have a bad product from the start, no amount of advertising will help your business.

“I guess we’re not selfish when we do our business,” says Adam. “If you come back and say the cookies are broken, I’ll give you a new box,” he said, explaining he couldn’t speak as to why other bakeries fail, but this is how Tom’s Bakery has succeeded.

Tom’s Bakery also does personalized fortune cookie baking, tailoring the hidden messages to customers’ liking on orders as small as 12 cookies. For these specialized orders, the family prints the fortunes themselves.

They also voluntarily removed hydrogenated oils from their ingredients list several years ago after learning of the health risks posed by the altered fat.



From left, Adam, Wai King, and Helen Lim, who operate Tom’s Bakery in Oakland’s Chinatown District.

PHOTO / Joseph Geha, *The Pioneer*

Other than the removal of hydrogenated oils, the recipe has stayed unchanged since the family developed it over 48 years ago, bridging the gap between generations in Chinatown.

Wai King, speaking through Adam as her impromptu translator, says the decision to begin making fortune cookies as a business was a relatively simple one.

“They came from China, there was nothing else to do, and at that time it was beginning to be popular, the fortune cookie,” said Adam on behalf of his mother. “She saw something that was popular, and there was an interest, so they did it. So that was it.”

“People come from next door, and say ‘Oh, I smell your cookies a block away!’” said Adam, explaining he has been doing this so long he has become desensitized to

the warm smell that fills the entire factory and spreads down the sidewalks of Ninth Street. “I can’t smell a thing if you hold it up to my nose!” he said.

A friend of the family suggested keeping the name simple, and put forth “Tom’s Bakery” when they were first starting, in reference to Thomas Lim.

“We try our best to give you a good product,” said Adam, stressing there isn’t much to their family philosophy other than that core pillar.

Speaking for Wai King again, Adam said, “She saying that people keep coming back for our product, and keep asking for our stuff so we have to do it.”

Tom’s Bakery is easy to spot when walking through Chinatown, just look for the yellow sign above the door.



A view of the Tom’s Bakery facility available to any customers who walk in to purchase fortune cookies.

PHOTO / Joseph Geha, *The Pioneer*

## San Leandro to Revisit Medical Marijuana Dispensary Ban

By KARISHMA SINGH  
Contributor

The Los Angeles City Council unanimously voted to ban hundreds of medical marijuana dispensaries on July 24, after local residents complained the shops had a negative impact on their city.

Los Angeles city officials estimate there are close to 850 dispensaries, of which 182 registered stores will still be able to operate. Over 760 pot dispensaries are to be issued letters ordering them to close shop. The ban will go into effect September 3.

Although the ban eradicates store-front operations, patients and care givers will still be allowed to grow marijuana for medical needs. Hospices, home-health agencies and licensed clinics will also be exempt from the ban.

The ban in Los Angeles City comes after a California appellate court issued a July 2 decision in the County of Los Angeles. Alternative Medicinal Cannabis Collective rejected bans on dispensaries imposed by local governments as unconstitutional under state law.

Despite the recent Supreme Court ruling, Los Angeles city councilmember Jose Huizar expressed he is excited about the step forward after advocating for the ban.

“If there’s 300 extra stores, that’s about 600 less than we have now,” said Rick Coca, spokesperson for councilmember Huizar.

Public information officer for Alameda County, Sherri Willis, said there is an issue of dispensaries growing in number.

Willis went on to express given the current situation with medical marijuana dispensaries, the County may find themselves in a similar position as Los Angeles.

“It will be interesting to see how this issue unfolds in the coming months even in Alameda County,” said Willis.

San Leandro has placed a hold on its ban of medical marijuana dispensaries because of a state appeals court ruling three weeks ago, which cites that such bans are not allowed under state law.

At the July 2 City Council meeting, San Leandro city attorney Jayne Williams requested a delay where the council had been scheduled to vote on an ordinance prohibiting dispensaries for a year.

Williams spoke of the temporary moratorium on dispensaries in the July council meeting, according to Granicus.

“We will collaborate with the League of California Cities on how to proceed,” said Williams. “The moratorium is in place until September 30. We will come back before the council with a recommendation before then.”

With the recent decision in Los Angeles, San Leandro Vice Mayor Michael Gregory shared his thoughts as to why Los Angeles went against the state appeal court ruling.

“There are over 700 dispensaries in Los Angeles and it is quite possible it is out of control,” said Gregory. “That’s why they probably just had to crack down and allow the ban.”

As many as 178 California cities from Calistoga to Camarillo, and 20 counties already have banned retail pot shops, according to the medical marijuana advocacy group Americans for Safe Access.